

Because of the Good News of Jesus Christ, we often focus on the New Testament, especially the four gospels. However, there is a lot that we can learn from the Old Testament about living as God wants us to. So, this morning, let's see what the Book of Amos has to tell us. Have you ever heard a sermon from Amos? If I asked you to pick up the Bible in the chair in front of you, could you find it in the Old Testament? It's between Joel and Obadiah.

Before God called him into service, the prophet Amos made his living as a shepherd tending both sheep and cattle, and also tending a sycamore-fig grove. Amos was a country farmer who was called by God to leave his native Judah and go prophesy in the Northern Kingdom of Israel where the king and the wealthy were oppressing and cheating the poor. In Chapters 7, 8, and 9, God gives Amos five visions as to the coming judgment and destruction of the Northern Kingdom. This morning let's look at one of these visions which is found in the seventh chapter, verses seven through nine.

Read Amos 7:7-9

Now based upon my previous career as a civil engineer, you may understand why I selected this particular passage. Not only was Amos a second career preacher like me, but this text has engineering written all over it. I guess that once you are an engineer, you are always one for the rest of your life.

One day God met the devil and asked him why he looked so happy. The devil said that things were looking up; they had gotten an engineer in hell and he had already installed an escalator, flush toilets, and an air conditioning system. God was surprised and immediately called Saint Peter to ask how could this happen; they were not supposed to send engineers to hell. Peter explained that they had some new people at the gate and there must have been a mistake. So, God told the devil to send the engineer back, but the devil refused. So, God said that He was going to sue him. To which the devil replied: "Where are you going to find a lawyer, I have all of them."

As I noted earlier God gave Amos a series of five visions on what was going to happen to the Northern Kingdom of Israel because of their disobedience. In this particular vision, Amos sees the Lord standing beside a wall with a plumb line in His hand. Now a plumb line is a string with a weight attached to one end. It was used as early as 2900 BC by Egyptian masons, and I bet Jesus even had one in His carpenter's shop. Now I am not that old, but I can date myself because I used a plumb line when surveying for the South Carolina Highway Department during college. Today they use high tech lasers for surveying, but back then we had the old fashion transit where you set the tripod over a geographic reference point and a plumb line was attached to the transit to make sure that it was directly aligned over the reference point.

Plumb lines are also used by masons and bricklayers to make sure that the wall is built perpendicular; that it is vertical and true. During construction, it is used to ensure that the alignment is straight and correct as each block or brick is placed. After construction, it is used periodically to check the wall to make sure that it is still straight and vertical, serving the purpose for which it was intended. If the wall starts leaning too much, it becomes a safety hazard, and the wall has to be demolished.

In the Bible the plumb line is a symbol of judgment according to righteousness. In Isaiah 28:17, the Lord says: "I will make judgment the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line." From the building blocks of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God had built up Israel as a wall. Over the years it had stood firm, but now God stands by it with the plumb line in His hand, to take another measurement of it. God is setting the plumb line against His chosen people to see if they are still "straight," following His laws and being true to Him, but unfortunately, they are not. Just as a leaning wall is dangerous and must be demolished for safety reasons, so too must the Northern Kingdom be destroyed because of their crooked alignment. The plumb line showed how far Israel had strayed from God; how warped by sin they were, being beyond correction.

Now brace yourself for what I'm about to say; just as God measured the Israelites back then with a plumb line so He measures each one of us today with a plumb line to see how faithful we are to Him and to the teachings of His Son Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6:19 that our bodies are temples to God. We are not our own: Jesus Christ has paid the price for our salvation on the cross at Calvary. In 1 Peter 2:5, we are told that we are living stones being used to construct a spiritual house. Each day by the decisions and actions that we take we are figuratively laying bricks and building a wall by how we live our daily lives. The question is whether these bricks and our wall are in alignment with God's purpose for our lives.

A painter of landscape scenes always kept several precious stones (emerald, sapphire, and ruby) in front of him on his easel. When asked why he did this, he replied: "These stones help me keep my colors true. In the course of time, without some constant reference, my eyes might lose its perception of color tones, and the colors I choose may not be right, may not be what they once were."

So, it is with us as we navigate this journey through life. Lest we wander astray, we need periodic exposure to some unchanging and unfading benchmark. Unless we are in touch with some constant reference, we can deviate and scarcely know it. We need some touchstone to test ourselves by, one that is worthy of what life should be, one by which the decisions and actions of our life can be set – we need our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In the tenth verse of Mark 12, Jesus identifies Himself as the cornerstone. The cornerstone in the Bible refers to a stone laid for the foundation; it was the starting point for the foundation of a building. The builders would get a stone from the quarry and chisel it carefully to get as near a right angle as possible. They would measure the placement of all the other stones against that cornerstone, that is the first measuring stone. It was the standard by which the walls of the building were set. When Jesus is called the cornerstone, God is saying: "I measure everything and everybody by my Son."

Jesus Christ is the cornerstone, the plumb line by which we should measure our lives. A plumb line reveals the truth. In one of the seven "I Am" sayings from John 14:6, Jesus states that He is the way, the truth, and the life. Now you may be thinking, there's no way that I will ever be as perfect as Jesus. And that's true, none of us will ever reach that extremely high level of perfection, but I found out a long time ago in engineering and in life that it is better to set your standards higher than lower. If you aim too low, you will hit it, but you will be disappointed with the results. As Christians, we are to set out standards high; we are to strive to become more like Jesus each and every day.

A plumb line is perfectly straight, but rarely is a wall in perfect alignment; even the best craftsman makes mistakes, and there is always some deficiency, however minor. I could tell you about some of the mistakes we made during the reconstruction of the Big I. It was a great engineering project, but like all construction projects it was not without problems. We have a statement in engineering that you measure with a micrometer, mark with a grease pencil and cut with an axe. The point is that you measure against that which is true, and then try your best to come as close as humanly possible to it.

Now this leads us to the question, if Jesus Christ is our standard, our plumb line, what tools do we need to correctly build this wall of life? What should be included in the Christian toolbox? Of course, one of the key tools is God's Word, the Bible. One of the fundamental beliefs of the Jewish faith is found in the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy where it is stated that "man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 – "All Scripture is inspired by God, and is useful for teaching, for showing mistakes, for correcting, and for training character, so that the person who belongs to God can be equipped to do every good work." God has given us His Word to guide us through life.

The best carpenter in the county was once asked, "What is your best tool?" Instead of pointing to a costly power saw or drill, he picked up a simple square and said: "This is the best tool; it makes all the others work." James tells us that we must not merely listen to the Word, but do what it says; talk is cheap. We must take the Bible and use it daily to ensure that our lives are erect, in alignment with God's will. This requires a daily habit of spending time alone with God

each and every day reading the Bible. Make the Bible your daily companion in life. If you haven't established a habit of a daily quiet time, please do so; you will never regret it.

The second tool in our Christian toolbox is prayer. One thing that you learn in construction is to have a good relationship and open communication with the chief inspector. You don't want any surprises when the job is done and you are going through final inspection. I remember one of the first construction projects that I was placed in charge of as an engineer trainee with the Federal government. It was a rest area on an Interstate Highway in West Virginia. I visited the project every week, but on the day of the final inspection, as we drove into the rest area, my boss asked me why there was a light pole in front of the guardrail and not behind it as the plans required. I had passed that pole for weeks, but missed it.

You know you can get so used to things around you that you don't realize when something is wrong or you are off course; you become complacent. It's like the old story of the frog in the kettle. If you throw a frog into a pot of hot boiling water, it will jump right out. However, if you place the frog in a pan of cool water and slowly turn up the heat, it will stay until it is cooked and you soon have frog legs for supper. We need to be in constant communication with God. He is a God of grace and forgiveness, but we sure don't want to miss anything or be surprised at final inspection. If we communicate with God daily and take time to listen to what He is telling us, then we will keep the wall of our life straight and upright.

The third tool that ensures that our wall is built straight and remains upright is regular attendance at church. I know this is especially difficult for some of you with all your travel, but it is a proven fact that participating in church on a regular basis helps you grow spiritually and helps you get through the ups and downs of daily life. Have you ever wondered why Canadian geese fly in a V-formation?

To evaluate this, two engineers calibrated the aero-dynamics of the V-formation in a wind tunnel. Each goose, in flapping its wings, creates an upward lift for the trailing goose. When all the geese do their part in the formation, the entire flock has a 71 percent greater flying range than if each bird flew alone. Each goose depends on the other to get to their destination. Also, when a goose begins to lag behind, the others "honk" it back into place.

We as a church, a fellowship of believers, help each other along our journey through life, ensuring that no one lags behind and that we each make it to our final destination – home with God. Hebrews 10:24-25 states: "Let us consider how to spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another."

The final tool in our toolbox is serving others. The best way to be sure that you are constructing the wall that God intended you to build is by demonstrating God's love through service to

others. The Golden Rule tells us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. The Apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 6:2 to carry each other's burdens and in this way, we will fulfill the law of Christ. He goes on in verse 9 to encourage us not to become weary in doing good for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Whenever we started a highway construction project, we were required to erect signs stating that the road ahead was under construction for so many miles. In a sense, God could erect signs on each of us stating "Life Under Construction." For our every thought, word and action impacts the quality of our life. The question for each of us to consider is: "Am I building my life according to God's standards?" If God placed a plumb line to our lives right now, would it be straight and true, or would it be leaning in the wrong direction? I know that this is a serious and hard question, and maybe one that you really don't want to consider. But it is a sure fact that we are all going to have to face final inspection someday.

However, do not be discouraged; hear the good news. Our God is very patient and compassionate. Unlike the Northern Kingdom when Amos saw God measuring it with a plumb line, God is not ready or eager to knock our wall down. On the contrary, because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God extends His grace to all of us – a grace of second and third and umpteen chances for us to right our wall. All we have to do is admit that the wall is leaning in the wrong direction and earnestly seek God's help to correct the problem. Remember that Jesus Himself was the Master Carpenter and He can fix anything if we will only give Him a chance. Let us each strive to get our life in plumb! Amen